

# Community Design & Land Use: UPGRADED



## EXISTING CONDITIONS

- The vast area “west of the Ashley” includes land within the City of Charleston, Charleston County, and St. Andrews Public Service District (PSD). City and County boundaries in West Ashley are intermingled and confusing, presenting planning and service challenges.
- Settlement in West Ashley dates to 1670 (Charles Towne Landing). Development has generally progressed from the east to the west. The Post-War period saw rapid expansion of suburban bedroom communities and small businesses. In the 1970s, West Ashley’s commercial corridors became lined with shopping centers and strip malls.
- West Ashley’s aging commercial corridors contain building sites with the greatest opportunity for change and improvement.

## COMMUNITY CONCERNS

- The West Ashley community wants to preserve its unique neighborhood character.
- West Ashley’s community character and identity is weakened by vacant strip malls, generic and aging shopping centers, and lack of identity at entryways.
- Many residents commute to work outside West Ashley, which contributes to traffic problems and decreases to quality of life.
- Many residents also are required to drive for shopping, dining, entertainment (particularly west of 526).
- There is a strong community belief that growth, particularly high density growth, happened in West Ashley without full regard to the infrastructure needed to support the growth and how this growth would impact the existing residential character.

## VISION

*Grow in the right places, in the right ways:*

- Preserve neighborhood character; focus new development in clear, identified areas
- Enhance community brand and identity
- Reuse vacant commercial sites, and improve the character of those sites
- Shorten trips with new work, entertainment, and recreation destinations
- Provide better infrastructure to support the growing population

## IMPLEMENTATION

- Formally adopt the *Plan West Ashley* vision.
- Coordinate implementation activities with Charleston County, Regional and State planning bodies.
- Develop a set of urban design principles for key sites and corridors.
- Establish a joint City/County Design Review Board (DRB) for key commercial corridors.
- Establish a West Ashley Community Brand & Identity Committee.
- Pursue neighborhood preservation.
- Draft and adopt mixed-use regulatory standards to replace and modernize existing zoning, to guide new development on commercial corridors, entryways, and other focused priority progress areas.
- Evaluate progress.





*above:* Map highlighting areas where future development and changes/improvements are most desired and anticipated. Plan focus areas (sites chosen to illustrate key principles of the vision for land use) are circled in red.

*below:* Visualizing one potential new neighborhood center in Outer West Ashley. The preservation of oak trees and natural areas, character, and scale of buildings reinforce the outer West Ashley identity. Small pockets of walkability, or “mini-Avondales” as termed by community participants, can meet the desire for destinations within short distances of homes.





# Transportation: CONNECTED



## EXISTING CONDITIONS

- The street network in West Ashley is characterized by several large multi-lane state-owned thoroughfares that carry significant amounts of vehicle traffic, supplemented by local neighborhood-scale streets that are either state-, county-, and city-owned. The system is constrained in that there are limited river crossings (Ashley and Stono Rivers), with major employment centers located across the rivers outside of West Ashley. It is also physically constrained on many corridors from further widening due to lack of available right of way.
- CARTA provides several transit routes; with the exception of Route 2 (the express route) all routes operate on 60-minute headways, which is an inadequate frequency for sustained and reliable service.
- In 2008, Charleston City Council passed a Complete Streets Resolution geared toward creating a network of streets that allows all modes of transportation (bicycle, pedestrian, public transit and automobile travel). Currently, West Ashley's multi-lane highway corridors are inaccessible and unsafe for pedestrians and cyclists, creating barriers to mobility between neighborhoods and to parks, schools and services.
- West Ashley offers opportunities related to active transportation and increased transit usage (if adequate service is provided), including moderately dense residential neighborhoods with nearby commercial districts, and the West Ashley Bikeway and Greenway trails.

## COMMUNITY CONCERNS

- Participants at community input workshops expressed congestion and traffic as top concerns for residents in West Ashley today.
- The West Ashley community wants more/enhanced connections: complete I-526, extend Glenn McConnell Parkway, connect the neighborhoods.
- West Ashley needs more/enhanced water connections, which could include a pedestrian/bike bridge and/or a water taxi.
- The West Ashley Bikeway and Greenway should be connected.
- Pedestrian/bike facilities need to be upgraded to be a viable option: connect sidewalks/crosswalks, create separated bike lanes, make safety improvements.
- Transit needs to be upgraded to be a viable option: explore premium service (rail, LCRT, PRT), park-and-ride, express service, shuttle.

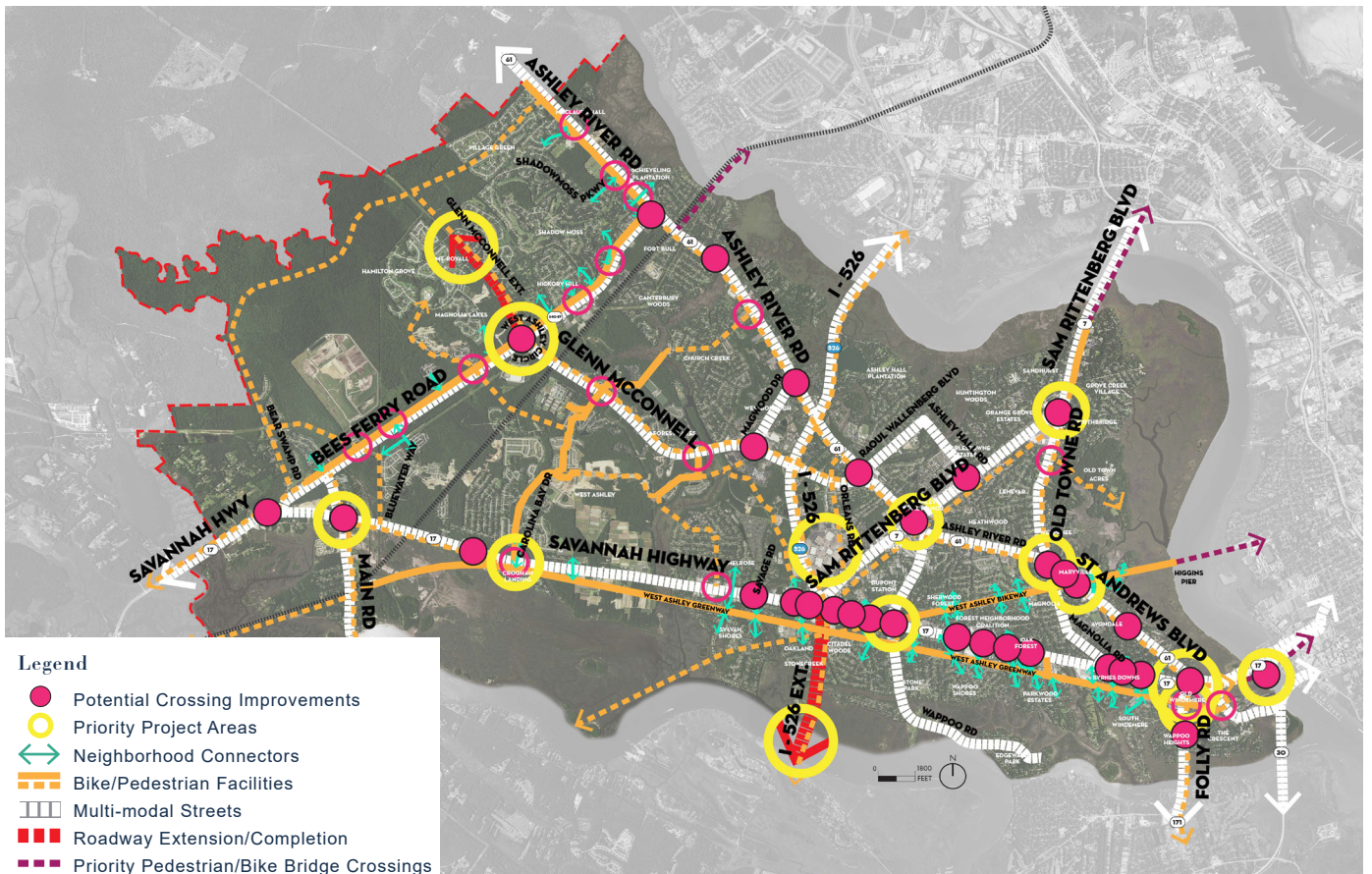
## VISION

- West Ashley is envisioned to be CONNECTED: connected to the region and neighborhoods, connected to jobs and schools, connected to recreational activities, and connected to goods and services.
- The plan has two major areas of focus: addressing vehicular traffic congestion; and then, just as importantly, providing enhanced mobility options to stem the growth in car trips by getting a larger percentage of future trips to occur using shorter car trips, walking, biking and transit.

## IMPLEMENTATION

- The vision of a better-connected West Ashley where residents and visitors can actually choose among varying modes of mobility is comprised of a multitude of specific projects and policy measures for vehicular, pedestrian, bicycle, and transit system improvements. Some of these initiatives have been in process for many years, and are reiterated in this plan as part of the regional network enhancements that are being moved forward by multiple jurisdictions and entities.





above: Multi-modal framework for West Ashley

below: Potential near-term enhancements, including access management (driveway consolidation coordinated with property owners), shared use paths, transit/high occupancy vehicle lanes (Liberty Lanes), and pedestrian/bicycle wayfinding.



# Green Infrastructure & Sustainability: RESILIENT



## EXISTING CONDITIONS

- West Ashley's low, waterfront terrain and historical development patterns are integral to what makes West Ashley unique and special to residents and visitors alike.
- At the same time, terrain may be the most significant challenge to West Ashley's future. Conversion of natural "sponge" wetlands to impervious surfaces and development in the floodplain over time have reduced the land's natural capacity to handle storm events, and have resulted in more and more flood-prone public and private investment. The Lowcountry Land Trust and South Carolina Conservation Bank are focused on land conservation, and will be important partners moving forward.
- West Ashley is increasingly vulnerable to more frequent and intense coastal storm events as well as the daily stresses of nuisance flooding and projected sea level rise.
- Multiple infrastructure projects and studies are underway, including drainage studies and improvement projects, water and sewer infrastructure upgrades, open space and recreation investments, and numerous City and County investments. At the scale of West Ashley as a whole, West Ashley is lacking a holistic and comprehensive vision to align actions and funding priorities with a long-term vision for the future.

## COMMUNITY CONCERNS

- Neighborhood flooding is affecting safety, value, and quality of life in West Ashley's neighborhoods. The community reports worsening conditions over the past decade.
- Many of West Ashley's existing neighborhood parks need revitalization, and many residents lack safe access to nearby park and recreation resources.
- Burying existing overhead utilities would add value by improving the quality and character of West Ashley's streetscapes.

## VISION

- Plan West Ashley establishes a framework for resilient growth consistent with the community's vision for its future, enabling stable economic development while minimizing risk from external economic and environmental forces. The vision for a resilient West Ashley is a combination of policies, strategies, priorities, guidelines, toolkits, prototypes, and demonstration projects spanning from the watershed and neighborhood scale down to the block, street, and individual building. The following over-arching elements guide the infrastructure vision:
  - **Where should West Ashley prioritize investment?**  
*Direct investment to higher, safer ground | Protect & heal natural resources | Connect natural and built systems*
  - **How should West Ashley become more resilient?**  
*Reduce local flooding impacts | Prioritize infrastructure maintenance | Encourage green infrastructure (GI) | Provide high-quality, useful, convenient open spaces*

## IMPLEMENTATION

- The implementation plan provides a matrix of actions to achieve these goals.
- Some recommended actions (such as inclusion of green infrastructure, flood control, and undergrounding of overhead utilities into the Fire Station and Memorial design) are immediate and may provide near term results to build awareness and momentum.
- Some recommended actions are long-term in nature (such as regulatory and policy actions to limit and heal development in the floodplain) requiring further study and monitoring of results over a long period of time.







# Housing: AFFORDABLE



## EXISTING CONDITIONS

- West Ashley's value as a residential community is, and always has been, its centrality within the region and easy access to the Peninsula via early bridges and, later, I-526.
- Housing in West Ashley is becoming increasingly expensive, endangering its longtime status as a community affordable to middle income households.
- As rising home prices place homeownership out of reach for more West Ashley households, demand for rental properties is also increasing from a wider range of demographics and household income levels.
- Most recent and planned new single-family and multifamily residential development in West Ashley is occurring at previously-undeveloped greenfield sites in the outer West Ashley area west of I-526. As a relatively affluent area of planned growth, outer West Ashley is in need of additional amenities, services, infrastructure, and traffic solutions to support this growth.
- Rising housing prices are driving rapid change in many inner West Ashley neighborhoods – particularly in historically affordable neighborhoods. These neighborhoods are increasingly desirable due to the comparatively low prices of their housing stock, convenient proximity to existing shopping, services, and commute routes to jobs throughout the region, and locations adjacent to long-desirable neighborhoods.
- Increased housing prices are also threatening the physical “community character” of West Ashley's oldest neighborhoods as new homes are built and older homes are changed.
- Rising housing prices increase the need for attainable, affordable, and workforce housing at all income levels. While Charleston and other agencies already offer programs and policies to address these needs, a variety of additional public policy and funding tools can be deployed or refined to expand affordability.

## COMMUNITY CONCERNS

- The community does not offer enough variety of housing choices to meet needs and preferences.
- Housing is becoming too unaffordable, which also creates a risk that seniors and lower or middle income residents could be displaced.
- Community character, scale, and cultural legacies are threatened by new development and change.
- The Citadel Mall property needs reinvestment – possibly including housing.
- Any taller housing should be limited and targeted for appropriate locations.

## VISION

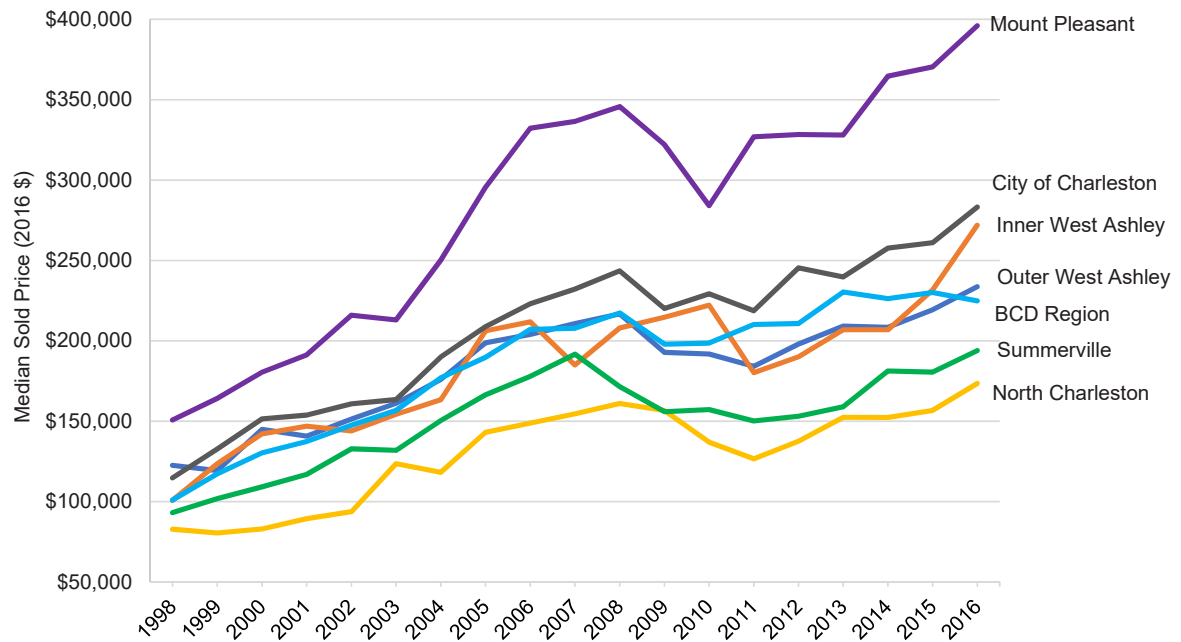
- Preserve community character
- Maintain affordability
- Add more housing options and supply to meet market demand and need
- Provide supportive infrastructure for housing, including multimodal transportation options (pedestrian, bicycle, automobile, and transit), parks and open space, and community facilities

## IMPLEMENTATION

- Implementation actions at the end of this chapter directly support achieving each component of this vision.



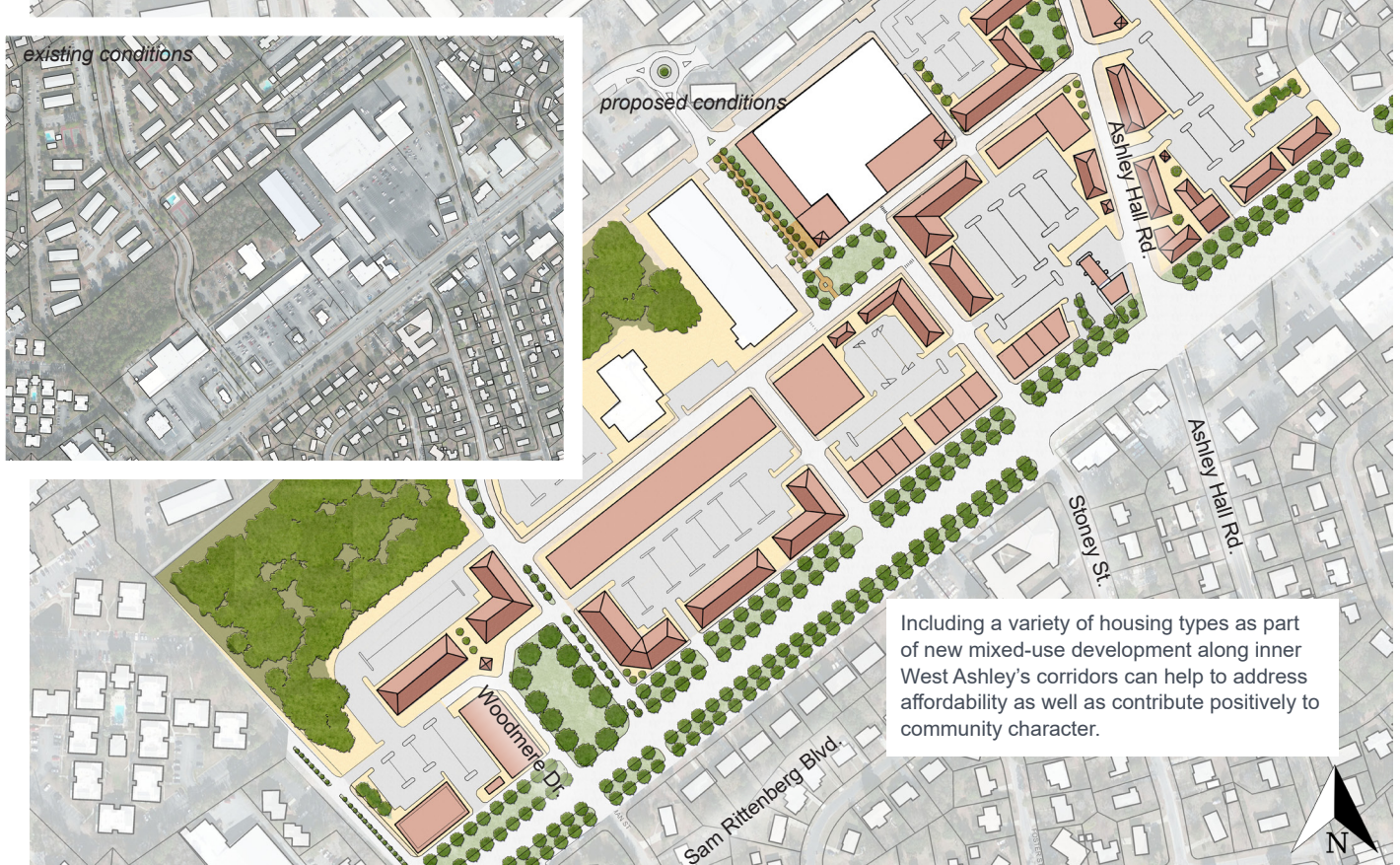
### Median Sold Price for All Homes in West Ashley and Surrounding Jurisdictions, 1998 to 2016



Data is shown for June of each year.

Source: Zillow, 2017; Strategic Economics, 2017.

above: Median home sales prices have increased dramatically since 2014 in inner West Ashley. As rising rents and housing prices in West Ashley outpace income growth in the area and region, more West Ashley households are experiencing increased housing “cost burdens” – i.e., households are dedicating high shares of their incomes to housing expenses.



# Economic Development: FOCUSED



## EXISTING CONDITIONS

- West Ashley historically functioned as a bedroom community that supported job centers elsewhere.
- There are now about 30,000 jobs in West Ashley, yet 84 percent of employed West Ashley residents commute elsewhere for work.
- A fundamental mismatch exists between the type of jobs in West Ashley and the types of jobs held by West Ashley residents. The majority of West Ashley jobs are in industries focused on household consumption, such as retail, restaurant, personal services, and medical businesses. Yet West Ashley residents are more likely to work in office-based professional jobs and manufacturing/warehouse jobs.
- One opportunity to diversify West Ashley's economy is to reposition the area to better attract growth of businesses/sectors that are tied to the regional export-based economy. The One Region Global Competitiveness Strategy identified five "high impact clusters," (groups of industries that are driving the regional economy). These include: aerospace, information technology, life sciences, advanced logistics, and automotive.
- West Ashley is well-positioned to begin addressing this office shortage for these high impact clusters; it already provides a range of housing choices to support a future diverse workforce. Second, extension of I-526 will make West Ashley much more accessible to all parts of the region.
- Much of West Ashley's retail space suffers from a popular perception of poor performance, but many of West Ashley's formerly grocery-anchored shopping centers are experiencing re-investment, with property owners optimistic about West Ashley's long-term growth and evolving demographics.
- Certain historic retail nodes have also made a "comeback" in West Ashley, such as Avondale. In the future, other nodes could emerge at locations in which major streets intersect with each other.
- Inner West Ashley likely has more retail space than the market will be able to support, especially in coming years as more retail activity shifts to the internet. Some commercial property owners will need to consider repositioning their property such that they can still take advantage of West Ashley's central location within the region. Housing and some office space are likely to emerge in the near- to mid-term to drive this process.
- Despite its ownership challenges, age, and vacancies, Citadel Mall represents an outstanding opportunity to rethink the mall concept, including adding new uses such as high-density housing and class A office space.

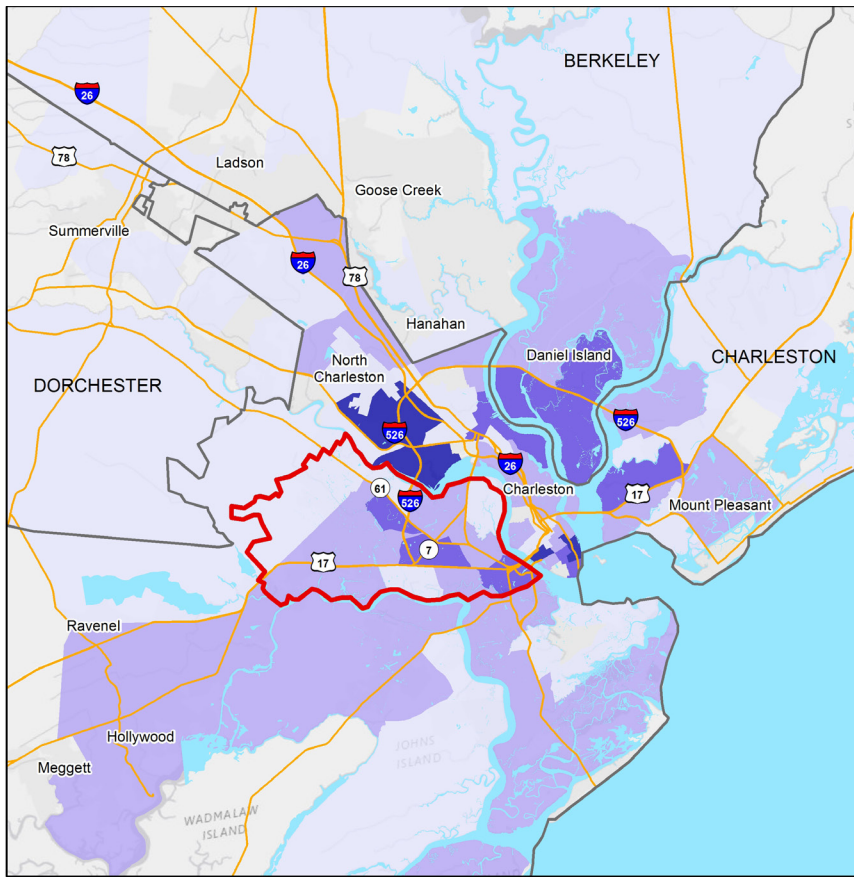
## COMMUNITY CONCERNS

- West Ashley will lose its character if new development does not accommodate small local businesses.
- There are too many vacant or visually blighted commercial properties along major arterial corridors.
- There are no small community-scale retail and services in outer West Ashley.
- Future jobs and economic development efforts should address the needs of existing and future residents at all skill levels.

## VISION

- Attract a wider range of businesses so more people who live in West Ashley can also work in the community.
- Allow and encourage transformation of Citadel Mall into a mixed-use "town center" for the entire community.
- Cultivate a West Ashley where all kinds of small and local businesses can thrive.
- Offer a full range of recreational, cultural, and civic facilities to support both residents and workers.
- Facilitate refreshing and refurbishing shopping centers and commercial properties that have vacant spaces and/or a blighted appearance, including introducing a new mix of uses such as office space and housing to create new neighborhood nodes.
- Support more small-scale community shopping opportunities in outer West Ashley that look and feel more like Avondale in inner West Ashley.





#### Number of Jobs per Work Destination Census Tract

- Less than 200
- 201 - 500
- 501 - 1,500
- 1,501 - 3,576

West Ashley Boundary

Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Counties

Major Roads

*left:* the U.S. Census' most recent "Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics" based on 2014 Census data estimates that 84 percent of employed West Ashley residents commute to other parts of the region for work. This high out-commute rate is indicative of West Ashley serving as a bedroom community for the rest of the region. Changing land use patterns to encourage mixed-use development can help to bring more jobs to West Ashley. With more people working locally, and with more options to walk or bike to work, vehicular congestion at peak commute hours can be reduced.

#### West Ashley Commute Patterns: Where Employed Residents of West Ashley Go to Work, by Census Tract, 2014

*right:* Citadel Mall, existing conditions.

*below:* Visualizing potential future conditions. Citadel Mall represents an outstanding opportunity to rethink the mall concept, including adding new uses such as high-density housing and class A office space.

